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MONOGRAPH



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IVORY-CARVING IN BENGAL.



BY

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A MONOGRAPH ON IVORY-CARVING IN BENGAL

CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL.

1.—Evidence of the existence of the art in ancient times.

FROM very remote antiquity, India has been a home of the elephant, and it is but natural that the old Aryan settlers of India, who had attained a high degree of civilization, should have learnt to use this noble animal and its products for the comfort and convenience of man. In *Rig Veda*, verse 1, *sukta* 4, *mondul* IV, we read:—

"As the king with his courtiers rides on the elephant, so thou (O, Fire) goest fearlessly forward with thy flames."

In the earliest books on Hindu mythology, we find that Indra, the Ruler of the Gods, had an elephant called "Airāvat," who is said to be the progenitor of the race. In the wars of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, we come across descriptions of regiments of elephant-riders marching to the battle-field. Knowing, therefore, as they did, the elephant so well, it is but natural that the civilized Indians of yore should have known the many uses to which the tusks, bones, &c., of the animal might be put.

In Chapter 79 of the *Brihatsanhita*, which is believed by Orientalists to have been written not later than the 6th century A.D., the author, in describing the materials with which royal bedsteads should be made, says:—

"Ivory is admired for all sorts of inlaid work with the timbers mentioned above. Good ivory should be used for purposes of decoration, and for this purpose a length of twice the circumference of the root, from the tapering end of the tusk, should be taken. A greater length may be taken from the tusks of the elephant living in marshy jungles, and a smaller length should be taken from the tusks of the elephant bred in the hills."—*Slokas* 19 and 20.

In the 84th Chapter of the *Ajodhyakanda* of the *Ramayana* (600 B.C.) the inhabitants of the city are represented as going out in procession with Bharat to seek Rama in the forest, in the order of the trade-guilds:—

"Jewellers, potters, ivory-workers, perfumers, goldsmiths, weavers, carpenters, braziers, painters, musical instrument makers, armourers, carriers, black-smiths, copper-smiths, makers of figures, cutters of crystals, glass-makers, inlayers and others."

In the last *sloka* of Chapter 231 of *Haribansa* (which is a sequel to the *Mahabharata* and written, therefore, before the time of Buddha, i.e., about 600 B.C.), in a description of the Court of Hiranyakashipu, we read:—

"The beautiful windows of that palace are built of ivory."

In Batsayana's *Kamasutra*, page 210, among the presents to the newly-married wife are mentioned the following:—

"Dolls made of linen, wood, horn and ivory, as well as those made of wax and clay."

In the 16th *sloka* of Chapter VI of Kalidas's *Raghubansa* (B.C. 56), and in the 60th *sloka* of Chapter I of *Magh*, ivory earrings and other ornaments are mentioned.

The first inscription on the right-hand side of the Audience Hall of the temple of Jaganath in Puri, contains an edict of the King Protap Purnashottama Deva, bestowing the following articles of furniture for the service of the Lord of the Temple:—

"Eight ivory couches, a jewelled jar, a flute, a horn, 8 gold sticks, 8 jewelled pitchers, 18 golden fans, 7 *chauris* or fly-flappers with jewelled handles, a gold-cloth turban, an ivory sofa, 4 jewelled earrings, 7 pairs of *merugarbha bautis* (bangles), 8 jewelled mattresses, 8 awnings."—*Vide* page 165, Appendix I, Volume II of the "Antiquities of Orissa."

Reference is also found in the works of foreign writers on India to the fact of the use of ivory being known to the ancient Indians. Arrian (who lived in the first century after Christ), in his account of the mode in which the Hindus equipped themselves for war, says:—

"They do not put saddles on their horses, nor do they curb them with bits in use among the Greeks or the Kelts, but they fit on round the extremity of the horse's mouth a circular piece of raw ox-hide studded with pricks of iron or brass, pointing inwards, but not very sharp; if a man is rich, he uses pricks made of ivory."—*MacCrindle's Translation.*

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Terry in his "Voyage to the East Indies, 1655," in describing the people of India, writes:—

"Their skill is likewise exquisite in the making of cabinets, boxes, trunks and strandishes, curiously wrought, within and without, *inlaid with elephant's teeth or mother-of-pearl, ebony, tortoise-shell or wire*; they make excellent cups and other things of agate or cornelian, and curious they are in cutting of all manner of stones, diamonds as well as others."

It is not necessary to multiply quotations, but from what has been already quoted, it is abundantly clear that the art of ivory-carving was known and cultivated in India from very early times.

2.—*Early history of the art in Bengal.*

2. Of the existence of the art in Bengal, prior to the Muhammadan rule, I have not been able, within the short time at my disposal, to find any direct proof. The fact is that the industry is, and has always been, from its very character, as I will explain presently, of minor commercial importance, and so no reference to it is to be found in ordinary books of history. The Bengali poetical works of the 16th and 17th centuries, such as those of Bidyapati, Chandidas, Mukundaram, and Bharat Chandra, are full of references to the many uses of the elephant, and in many places, necklaces of pearls obtained from the elephant's skull *গজদন্ত*, which is a traditional creation of the Indian poet's fancy) are mentioned. But I have not been able to trace any reference to articles actually carved out of the elephant's tusks. Considering, however, that the hills and jungles of the north-eastern and south-western districts of Bengal have always abounded in herds of wild elephants, that numerous references are found in classical Bengali to the various ways in which the services of this animal were utilised by the ancient inhabitants, and that the art of carving in wood, conch-shell, stone and other materials was practised in various parts of the province in olden times, it will not, I hope, be deemed an unwarrantable assumption that the art of ivory-carving was practised here in early times.

3. The well-known dislike of the orthodox Hindus, particularly of Bengal, for all articles manufactured from bones, which are, with a few exceptions, impure things in their eyes, prevented the general use of ivory articles by them, especially in their many religious rites and ceremonies. Such articles had therefore to be kept in a separate part of the house, only for their beauty and seldom for their utility, and naturally few among the ordinary people would, in such circumstances, care to keep them, especially when their cost was not a mere trifle. It would have been entirely to the advantage of the art, if the various images of idols which the ivory-carver manufactures had been allowed by the *Shastras* to be used for purposes of actual worship. That is, I think, why in Hindu times, the art of ivory-carving could find but limited encouragement in Bengal amongst the rich and the lovers of fine arts, and though that encouragement was just of the sort that is necessary to develop skill in the art, it narrowed down the prospects of any extensive trade in it.

CHAPTER II.

LOCALITIES IN WHICH THE ART IS AT PRESENT PRACTISED.

1.—RANGPUR

4. The only districts of Bengal in which the art of ivory-carving is practised at present are Murshidabad and Rangpur, the former being the better known of the two in this respect. The ivory-carving work of Rangpur has never been very famous, and at present it appears to exist merely in name. There are only six families of ivory-carvers, or Khondikars as they are locally called, in village Panga, in the Kurigram subdivision of Rangpur. They say their forefathers were brought from Bihar and were settled there by the Raja of Panga, from whose house their hamlet is only a mile off. There were 10 or 12 families before, but some have died out. Formerly they enjoyed *jagirs* or rent-free holdings granted by the Raja, but these have since been assessed. The industry, on which they say they formerly lived in affluence, is now in a moribund condition for lack of encouragement, and the existing workmen have lost much

of the skill their fathers possessed in the art. They have all betaken themselves to agriculture, which is now their chief occupation, and work on ivory only in leisure moments when they get orders from the zamindars or officials, or when the local fairs (at Sindurmati and Masankura) take place. At present there are only four men who possess the requisite skill to make such homely articles as combs, ear-scratchers, *churis* or bangles, dice, chessmen, etc. It is said that the forefathers of the present Khondikars could make flower-vases, chairs, fans and sleeping mats of ivory, but their descendants have forgotten the art. Besides tasks of elephants, the carvers of Panga also use horns of stags and buffaloes for making dice, chessmen and sticks. The Panga Khondikars are Mussulmans by religion. They are of the same rank as ordinary cultivators of the district and intermarry with them. The profession which they follow is not considered derogatory in any way. The Rangpur Khondikars have no shops, and sell their products at Kurigram or Rangpur, where they take, when they have any occasion to go there, whatever small articles of ivory they may have ready, and dispose of them if chance should bring any customers in their way. In short, the industry is at present of very small account in Rangpur, and is not likely to endure long. From page 5, volume II of the Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883, it appears that there were ivory-carvers at that time in other parts of the district of Rangpur, such as Kakinia and Barabari, but they have disappeared since.

2.—MURSHIDABAD.

Tradition regarding the introduction of the art into Murshidabad.

5. The principal centre of ivory-carving in Bengal has always been the district of Murshidabad, and this monograph is therefore mainly concerned with the art as it has flourished there. There are a number of interesting traditions current in the district regarding the introduction of the art. It is said that once the Nawab of Murshidabad asked for a ear-prick or ear-scratcher, and a grass one was brought to him. The Nawab said it was certainly not worthy of the Nawab-Nazim of Bengal, and he wanted one of ivory. An ivory-carver was at once brought to Murshidabad for preparing an ivory ear-scratcher for the Nawab. Girish Chunder Bhaskar, who may be said to be the head of the present ivory-carvers of Berhampur, related to me the following interesting reminiscences of the life of Tulsi Khatumber, the son of the man who cunningly obtained the secrets of the art from the unsuspecting Muhammadan artist, who was brought from Delhi by order of the Nawab as described above, by prying through a small aperture in the wall of the room in the Nawab's palace where the latter used to work. Tulsi learnt the art from his father and excelled him. In fact, Tulsi is reputed to be the best master of the art Murshidabad has ever produced, and is regarded as the father of the art there. All the ivory-carvers of Murshidabad to this day bend their heads and raise their joined palms in veneration whenever his name is mentioned.

6. Tulsi was a devout Baisnav or worshipper of Srikrishna, as all his followers are to this day. As a pious Baisnav he had a great passion for pilgrimages, and on that account the Nawab always kept him under a strict guard, so that His Majesty might derive the fullest benefit from the celebrated artist's wonderful genius. Tulsi, however, managed to elude the watch, and one day, while bathing in the Bhagirathi, which flows past the city, swam across the stream and fled to Rajmahal. But he had no money with him, and so contrived, with such tools as he could borrow from the local carpenters, to construct a wooden horse which fetched him Rs. 5. With this money he went to Gaya. Here he manufactured some idols, and with the money he obtained by their sale, he left for Benares. At the latter place he purchased some ivory, which he took with him to Brindaban, where he got a few tools for carving, made by a blacksmith. Thus he was able to turn out some articles of ivory, which he sold, and then proceeded to the temple of Radha Govindji, the tutelary deity of the Maharaja of Jaipur. There Tulsi presented the Maharaja with what has ever since been regarded by his followers as the best product of his genius. He also reproduced, under orders of the Maharaja, his favourite he-goat in ivory, the sight of which is said to have sent the Maharaja into raptures, who then and

there made a present to the artist of all the valuables on his own person, together with Rs. 2,000 in cash. Tulsi was induced by his illustrious host to stay in Jaipur for some time.

After 17 years' wanderings to different places of pilgrimage, Tulsi returned to Murshidabad, and was forthwith summoned to the presence of the Nawab then on the *musnud*, who had already heard of his wonderful genius. The Nawab ordered him to reproduce from memory a likeness in ivory of His Majesty's father, who had died during the years of Tulsi's pilgrimage. It is said the statue he made was so exact and life-like that the Nawab ordered that the whole of his salary for the 17 years of his absence on pilgrimage should be paid at once, besides granting him a good dwelling-house in Mohajantuli near the city of Murshidabad.

Tulsi Khatumber had two favourite pupils, Manick Bhaskar and Ram Kishore Bhaskar. The latter was the uncle of Lal Behari Bhaskar, of Enaitullâ-Bâg near Baluchar, who died a few years ago. His son, Nilmoni, now does carving-work to order at the Nizamut.

7. I give the above story not so much for the interesting tradition it embodies, as to show that, after all, the art of ivory-carving in Murshidabad is not many generations old. My idea is that the original home of the art in Bengal was Sylhet, a district of North-Eastern Bengal now included in the province of Assam, where large herds of elephants roam to this day, and where elephant tusks were consequently abundant. Srihatta or Sylhet has long been famous for its ivory mats, fans and other articles. When in Muhammadan times the seat of Government was transferred to Dacca and then to Murshidabad, some of the manufacturers found it profitable to remove themselves to the capital of the Province.

Social position of the ivory-carvers of Murshidabad.

8. As is well known, every industry among the Hindus is in the hands of a particular caste or trade-guild. The ivory-carvers of Murshidabad are all Hindus and belong to the Baisnav sect. The caste is called Bhaskar, or image maker, and is a branch of the carpenter caste. This proves that the caste is much older than this particular art. Before the introduction of ivory-carving, the Bhaskars of Murshidabad had as their caste occupation the making of clay and stone images, wood-carving and wall-painting. Like other castes, or, perhaps, even more than they, the ivory-carvers of Murshidabad are very exclusive, and would not on any account impart their knowledge to another of a different caste. Although this exclusiveness is to be deplored as preventing the spread of the knowledge of the art, it serves to maintain the solidarity of the guild, and a fellow-Bhaskar need never sink into poverty if he has the mind to acquire the art and earn his living by it. Not only would he be encouraged to learn the art, but would even be helped to set up his business, if he could acquire a little proficiency. It is this salutary custom which causes the ivory-carvers to be distinguished from the other less exclusive castes in Murshidabad by the absence of any abject pauperism amongst them. I saw the houses of some of the master craftsmen, which are fairly respectable masonry structures, of which any member of the lower middle class could well be proud. In fact, they seemed to me to be as good as many of the upper classes in their style of living. The Bhaskars do not intermarry with other carpenter castes, and consider themselves superior to them.

Industrial position of the ivory-carvers of Murshidabad.

9. The industrial position of the ivory-carvers is somewhat similar to their social one, though it is difficult to estimate in rupees, annas and pies, the value of the industry to them. The masters of the workshops are naturally better off than the ordinary workmen, but even the most intelligent of the former has not the remotest idea of what his income is. He keeps no accounts—neither of what he spends on his own household nor of what he expends on his workshop. All he can tell you is that in some years he can save some Rs. 50 and in some years nothing. He buys his ivory sometimes in cash and at other times on credit, and has, as often as not, to pay his operatives in advance. He borrows and lends like other people; only he does not know what his annual income or expenditure is. This is no doubt true of most people of the

artisan and agricultural classes in this country, and this happy-go-lucky way of existence is, to my mind, at the root of their pauperism. It will be difficult to find any means of increasing their staying powers so long as they are not strongly imbued with the necessity of keeping proper accounts of their income and expenditure.

10. The ivory-carver, however, manages to live in a decent style, but in a hand-to-mouth fashion, and though he may earn between Rs. 600 and Rs. 800 in a year, he has very little saved, if anything, at the end of it. He delights in squandering his small savings, and more, if possible, on his child's marriage or on other similar festive occasions. The workmen, too, are equally improvident with their masters. They earn from Rs. 12 to Rs. 25 a month, according to their proficiency and skill in the art. The apprentice boys sometimes get only food and raiment, and sometimes a small daily allowance of annas two to four. The permanent workmen have, however, extra earnings at times when they carry out orders at home. They generally work about eight hours a day, though they do not—neither the masters nor the men—trouble themselves about keeping regular hours in the shops. In this, as in every other thing, they take life easy.

3.—THE IVORY-CARVERS OF CALCUTTA.

11. There are three shops in Calcutta where some little work in ivory is done. They are all situated in Harcatta Lane in Bow Bazar. All three carvers are carpenters by caste, and carve such plain things as buttons, chains, combs, mouth-pieces of *hukks*, and walking sticks, from ivory, horns and elephant bones. They have no pretensions to perforation or ornamental work, nor in the making of statues and images. I could find nothing beyond a few sets of studs and a few *hukka* pipes and combs ready for sale, and they told me they only work to order as a rule. They have no assistants in their shops, and they manage both the manufacture and the sale themselves.

4.—ELSEWHERE IN BENGALE.

12. From the Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition it appears that even so recently as 1883, the art of ivory-carving used to be practised in other districts of Bengal, such as Hill Tippera, Chittagong, Dacca, Patna, and in various parts of the district of Cuttack, but it has since died out in those places. In Balasore there is yet one man alive who does some carving work. He makes ivory sticks, ivory chains and the like when ivory is supplied to him. As orders for ivory articles are few and far between, he has, in order to earn a living, to manufacture cheap articles from horns and bones.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROCESS OF IVORY-CARVING.

1.—Raw material.

13. The ivory-carvers of Murshidabad get their raw material sometimes from Calcutta and sometimes from Rai Meg Raj Bahadur, of Azinganj, who acts as a middleman for the supply of ivory, and also buys manufactured articles from the masters of workshops and the individual workers, and sends them for sale to Calcutta. Murshidabad carvers generally prefer Assam or Burma ivory to others, as it is both light and soft, and yields easily to the chisel without going through any preliminary process of softening.

14. The Rangpur Khondikars generally do not buy ivory on their own account, and do not know whence to procure it. They work on odd ends and bits of ivory which they receive as gifts from the zamindars of Assam, who engage them occasionally. The ivory they use comes ordinarily from Assam, and formerly the hillmen of Manipur and Assam used to come down to the plains of Bengal to sell ivory, but that business has ceased to exist since the extension of the Elephant Preservation Act to the hill districts. Besides, the dealer is required to take out a license for the purpose, but the Khondikars do

not know whence to obtain a license and what is its cost. How and where to obtain their raw material is at present a great difficulty with the Khondikars of Rangpur, as they live so far away from Calcutta. The other great difficulty with them is how to dispose of their products, as the local demand is very limited, and they would never dare to travel out of their own district.

15. For the solid end of the tusk, which is called the *nakshidant*, the Murshidabad carvers pay generally Rs. 8-8 to Rs. 10 per seer; for the middle portion, known as *khondidant*, Rs. 15 to Rs. 16 a seer; and for the thick end, which is hollow, called *guthardant*, Rs. 7 to Rs. 8 per seer. Bombay ivory, or rather the imported ivory, which the Murshidabad carver thinks is hard, and, therefore, liable to crack under the chisel, sells at Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 less per seer for the different parts of the tusk taken.

2.—The tools used by the Murshidabad carvers.

16. The instruments which the Murshidabad carvers generally use are mostly those used by the ordinary carpenters and wood-carvers, only some are smaller and finer than theirs. They are enumerated below :—

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) Files of various sizes. | (6) Pliers. |
| (2) Saws. | (7) Compasses. |
| (3) Small chisels. | (8) A vice. |
| (4) Screw-drivers. | (9) Mallets (wooden). |
| (5) Awls of various sizes. | (10) A T square. |
| | (11) A lathe. |

The instruments used are of a very rude description, as will appear from plate No. 1, and although 70 or 80 different things are employed, they answer to one or other of the classes mentioned above, the main difference being in size and fineness.

3.—The process of carving.

17. As I have already remarked, the Murshidabad artist does not pass his ivory through any preliminary process of softening. The first thing he does is to cut a block of ivory of sufficient bulk for the required article. Then a sketch of what is going to be carved is drawn in pencil on the block, the sketch being either the design of the workman himself or a copy of one given to him. A clever workman can do his carving without any preliminary sketch, if the article to be manufactured is one which he is accustomed to carve. Sometimes the design is sketched on paper. To illustrate the various stages of the work, I have annexed in plate No. I illustrations of the carving of a cow in four stages, the first being that of the pencil sketch on ivory, and the last, that of the completed carving. It is the work of Nemai Chandra Bhaskar, of Kiliagra, a young and clever carver, who obtained a silver medal at the Indian Industrial Exhibition of 1898. It is more to get a rough idea of the parts and proportions, that they resort to sketching as a preliminary process. When a suitable piece has been cut out of the tusk by means of the *drae* or saw, and the rough tracing of the design has been made thereon, the *rukhnis*, or chisels, large and small, according to the size of the parts to be chiselled off, are employed. This brings the model to a rough shape. Then *rusts*, or files of different sizes and fineness, are employed to work the model into a finer shape; drills of different sizes are used to drill holes for perforated work. Finishing strokes are given with the *kalamis*, or iron pencils of various degrees of fineness, some as fine as needles and others like knives or sketch-erasers. When the model is thus brought exactly to the designed shape, it is soaked in water for some time, and the surface is polished first with fish scales and lastly with common chalk. The Murshidabad carvers are better accustomed to give the finishing touch with file and fish scale than with brush or pencil. For fastening figures into stands and for joining parts, fine and small ivory pegs are used. For turning, a heavy lathe, as shown in plate No. I, is used. When they have to carve from a new pattern, and they find that none of their existing tools are suitable or fine enough for the work, the Murshidabad Bhaskars will at once improvise a suitable new tool in the middle of their work.

CHAPTER IV.

POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF THE INDUSTRY.

1.—*The merits and defects of the art as practised in Murshidabad.*

18. The best ivory-carvers of Berhampur can turn out any practicable model from a pattern, and they are frequently employed by the European residents of the station to make crucifixes or other imitations of western things. But they do not seem to be able to reproduce faces or features with any approach to accuracy. The stiffness in the representation of flowers and leaves is also a well-known defect in the indigenous Indian art, and the ivory-carver does not form an exception to the rule. Perhaps, also, there is not sufficient variety of work for want of enterprise and encouragement. Still the ivory-carving of Murshidabad is not so stereotyped in its nature as that of the same art elsewhere in India.

19. No comparison, on the other hand, is possible between the articles turned out by men whose artistic tastes have, by national instinct and also for want of a special training, remained stunted for generations, and who employ the most primitive tools, and those turned out, for instance, with the help of elaborate machinery in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. That they are still appreciated by Europeans, and that they find a ready sale in the markets of the enlightened West, is due to various causes :—(1) Ivory-carving is believed by many to be primarily an Indian art, and an ivory article from the original soil is sure to have a fascination for the lovers of the art, in spite of its rudeness of design, and in fact, because of this rudeness. An ivory fan from Mandalay, an ivory mat from Sylhet, an ivory Durga from Murshidabad, or an ivory Taj from Delhi, has a peculiar value of its own, whatever be the value of the workmanship. (2) The ivory articles made in Murshidabad and Delhi are in some cases really beautiful and artistic, though not quite so finished as similar articles made in Europe. (3) The rudeness of the implements used renders the productions the more interesting. (4) A complete set of ivory articles generally made in Murshidabad is beautifully illustrative of the national customs, ideas and religious practices of the Hindus of Bengal.

20. The following appreciation of the art as practised in this country, taken from page 511 of Professor J. F. Royle's "Lectures on the Arts and Manufactures of India, 1852," will perhaps be read with interest in this connection :—

"A variety of specimens of carving in ivory have been sent from different parts of India and are much to be admired, whether for the size or the minuteness, for the elaborateness of detail, or for the truth of representation. Among these the ivory-carvers of Berhampur are conspicuous. They have sent a little model of themselves at work, and using, as is the custom of India, only a few tools. The set of chessmen carved from the drawings in Layard's "Nineveh" were excellent representations of what they could only have seen in the above work; showing that they are capable of doing new things when required; while their representations of the elephant and other animals are so true to nature, that they may be considered the works of real artists and should be mentioned rather under the head of fine arts than of mere manual dexterity."

This is very high praise, indeed, regard being had to the great authority from which it emanates, but I doubt very much whether the cap would now fit well on the heads of the present generation of carvers. It shows, however, the high watermark the art attained here in the middle of the last century.

2.—*The present position of the art in Murshidabad.*

21. For lack of encouragement, the Murshidabad carvers have been obliged to sacrifice quality to quantity. Established during the declining days of the Nawabs of Murshidabad, the encouragement the art received from them was but limited and sporadic. During the palmy days of Kasimbazar, when many Europeans belonging to the cotton and silk factories of the old East India Company lived there, the ivory-carvers carried on a brisk business, both in the district and out of it. Even in 1811, when the place was fast sinking into the obscurity from which it had temporarily emerged, it was still "noted for silk, hosiery, *koras* and inimitable ivory-work." Similarly, when Berhampur rose

into importance as the chief military station in this Province, the art flourished there for a time, but with the decline of the military importance of the town it began to wane, and had it not been for the railway communication which has made a trade with Calcutta and Bombay possible, the art would have died out long ago. Formerly the ivory-carvers used sometimes to get large orders from Government for supplying specimens of their work for the various exhibitions in England and other European countries, as also in India, but this has been discontinued in recent years, as collections for exhibitions are now generally made on loan from noblemen and zamindars, like the Nawab of Murshidabad and the Maharaja of Kassimbazar, who, of course, have the very best specimens in their possession.

22. Within the last 30 years the industry has altogether died out from Mothrá, Daulatbazar and Ranshagorgram, all three villages near the city of Murshidabad, in the jurisdiction of Daulatabad thana. Thirty years ago there were over 50 families of ivory-carvers at Mothrá, and even so recently as 12 years back there were about a dozen houses left. Many of them died of malarious fever, and the few survivors have migrated to Baluchar, Berhampur and other places, with the result that at present there is not a single Bhaskar in Mothrá.

23. If we compare the earnings of the ivory-carvers in former times with those of the present day, we shall be able to judge why the industry has declined so much, so that there are not more than a dozen families of carvers now all over the district, while 30 years back there were over 50 houses in the village of Mothrá alone. Tulsi Khatumber and his successors, Manik Bhaskar and Ram Kishore Bhaskar, were employed by the Nawab of Murshidabad on Rs. 15 a month, as a sort of retaining fee, for they were paid separately and often handsomely, for the articles they produced. As will be readily imagined, remuneration at that time depended not on the quantity of work turned out, but on the excellence of the workmanship. Besides, the cost of living was then perhaps less than half of what it is now. If we compare the above with the state of things at present, when the average salary of an ordinary workman has come down to Rs. 15 a month, although prices and the standard of living have risen immensely in the meantime, we should wonder rather that the art has survived so long than that it has declined. Had it not been for the wonderful vitality of the caste system, it would, I have no doubt, have ceased to exist long ere this.

24. At present there are not more than 25 ivory-carvers, principals and apprentices all told, living in the district of Murshidabad. The names and postal addresses of the principal workmen are :—

No.	Names.	Postal addresses.	REMARKS.
1	2	3	4
1	Girish Chunder Bhaskar	...	Ivory-carver, Khagra, Berhampur post-office, district Murshidabad, Bengal.
2	Nemai Chunder Bhaskar	...	
3	Gopal Chunder Bhaskar	...	
4	Durluv Chunder Bhaskar	...	
5	Hari Kristo Bhaskar	...	
6	Narna Chunder Bhaskar	...	
7	Gopal Chunder Bhaskar	...	Ivory carver, Enaitullá-Bág via Jangunge post-office, district Murshidabad, Bengal.
8	Gopi Kristo Bhaskar	...	
9	Nilmoni Bhaskar	...	
10	Murari Mohan Bhaskar	...	
11	Gokul Chunder Bhaskar (senior)	...	
12	Umesh Chunder Bhaskar	...	
13	Mohesh Chunder Bhaskar	...	
14	Sriram Chunder Bhaskar	...	

The first two are the best artists in Berhampur, and all orders for big things are generally given to them for execution. Both of them have won medals in exhibitions, and supply ivory articles to such Calcutta firms as Messrs S. J. Tillery & Co. and H. C. Ganguli & Co.

25. The ivory-carvers of Murshidabad say that they ordinarily charge 25 per cent. on the value of the ivory used, for their labour and skill. They admit that they do not devote much time and patience to what they usually produce, and yet they are more finished-looking and more appreciated by the public than similar articles produced elsewhere in India except perhaps in Delhi.

26. The ivory articles of Murshidabad cost half as much again as similar articles made elsewhere in India, and sometimes even more than this. The chief reason for this, according to the carvers, lies in the quality of ivory used and in the absence of joinings generally in the Murshidabad products. The Murshidabad workman hates joinings. He would rather make a Durga of half the size of that shown in plate No. III for Rs. 100 than one of the full size for double or treble that price, as he has, in the latter case, to join his pieces together. I am not, however, prepared to accept the theory that the ivory used by the Murshidabad carvers is superior to or more costly than the African ivory used by the carvers in other parts of India. I am inclined to think that the higher wages and cost of living, prevailing in Bengal, is in a great measure responsible for the higher prices demanded by the Murshidabad carvers.

27. The following is a list of the ivory articles usually made in Murshidabad with their prices:—

No	Articles.	Prices.	REMARKS.
1	2	3	4
1	Alphabet	1 to 1½ annas	Per letter.
2	Durga (the ten-handed goddess, with her attendant gods and goddesses, in the act of fighting with the giant Mohisasura), Plate No. III.	Rs. 50 to Rs. 300	For Rs. 150 the best article that can be made from one block of ivory can be had.
3	Kali standing on the body of Shiva with two attendant goddesses.	" 40 to " 120	
4	Jugudhātsee standing on the lion and elephant with two attendant goddesses	" 50 to " 125	
5	Jaganath's car procession, Plate No. III.	" 50 to " 150	
6	Palanquin, single or with bearers and attendants.	" 15 to " 100	
7	Chessmen	" 25 to " 250	
8	Work-box	" 25 to " 300	
9	Elephant, single or caparisoned, or fighting with tiger.	" 5 to " 150	
10	Horse, plain or with rider	" 2 to " 30	
11	Bullock-carts	" 8 to " 50	
12	Maur-punkhi, or peacock state barge, Plate No. IV.	" 10 to " 100	
13	Camel, single or with driver	" 4 to " 40	
14	Cow, single or with calf	" 3 to " 20	
15	Dog	" 2 to " 8	
16	Pig	" 2 to " 10	
17	Buffalo	" 3 to " 20	
18	Crocodile	" 5 to " 20	
19	Deer	" 2 to " 15	
20	Plough, with ploughman	" 3 to " 20	
21	Locket and chain (with or without gold or silver mounting), Plate No. II.	" 5 to " 50	
22	Earrings	" 4 to " 10	
23	Figures of zenana ladies, Hindu priests, washermen, water-carriers, peons, porters, tailors, sepoy, fakirs, policemen.	" 2 to " 5 each	
24	Paper-cutter	Rs. 1 to Rs. 30	
25	Bangles, bracelets with or without gold or silver mountings, Plate No. II.	Rs. 20 and upwards	

The price varies according to the size of the pieces, and also according to the quality of the work.

No.	Articles.	Prices.	REMARKS.
1	2	4	5
26	Card-case	Ra. 6 to Ra. 15	The price varies according to the size of the pieces, and also according to the quality of the work.
27	Knitting needles	Annas 8 for a set of four.	
28	Crochet needles	Re. 1	
29	Napkin rings	Ra. 2-8 each	
30	Photo frames	" 15 to Ra. 60	
31	Caskets	" 30 to " 100	
32	Walking sticks	" 25 to " 75	
33	Châmur or fly-flap.		
34	Combs.		

28. Of course, the above list is by no means exhaustive. The Murshidabad carvers turn out various other toys and trinkets, and of mythological subjects there is, perhaps, no end. Only one mythological figure the Murshidabad Bhas-kars will not carve or sell, and that is that of Srikrishna, as they are His followers and cannot *create* or *sell* the deity they worship. Although the Murshidabad carver can carve any practicable model of almost every useful and ornamental object, it must not be supposed that there is a regular supply of all these things in the market, nor should one expect to find many such objects in daily use anywhere, except, perhaps, the bangles and combs which are worn by up-country and Deccan women generally. There is usually but a limited and fitful outturn, of which the greater part is of a trivial nature, as has been already hinted above. There are no regular shops in Murshidabad where articles of ivory are exhibited and sold. The workshops are located in a part of their dwelling-houses, and the few things that they have at any time ready for sale are kept there.

3.—Prospects of the industry.

29. The appended illustrations will serve to convey some idea of the present condition and capabilities of the art as it exists in Bengal, or rather in Murshidabad. They demonstrate the fact that though the art of ivory-carving is no longer in the flourishing condition in which it once was, and though the art was never cultivated here scientifically, it is by no means extinct or incapable of revival either on scientific or national lines. Murshidabad no longer occupies the important position it once occupied as the seat of the Government of the province, and a great commercial centre as well as a military station. Situated as it is at a distance from Calcutta and from the main line of railway, its products seldom find sale beyond the place of manufacture. The ivory-carvers, though not indigent and needy, are not prosperous enough to employ agents or to keep any large stock in hand, especially when the custom, even in the metropolis, is not so plentiful or steady.

30. Formerly many of the chiefs of Orissa and the wealthy landlords of Bihar and Bengal used to keep these artists in their pay, and not unoften would grant them *jagirs* for the support of their family. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the Maharajas of Darbhanga, Tippera, Cooch Behar and Mourbhanj, the Rajas of Atguri and other *killās* of Orissa, the Nawab of Murshidabad, the Maharajas of Hatwa, Bettiah and Dumraon, and many other princes of Bengal, had ivory-carvers in their pay, who would manufacture various fancy articles out of the ivory produced in the elephant stables of their employers. But that is now a thing of the past. The ivory-carver counts no such patrons now, and looks to European tourists or residents for encouragement, and for endeavours to make his art-wares better known in England and other western countries.

31. The practice of the art itself must be improved before its products can be expected to achieve popularity in enlightened countries. Like every other Indian artist, the ivory-carver at present has certain stock models which are reproduced time after time with dull monotony and, rarely, with slight variations.

in ornamentation. Without grafting on it Western patterns wholesale, it is desirable to lift the art out of its crystallized tradition, so as to give free scope to the artistic feeling and imagination which most Indian artists possess, and which the ivory-carver is fully capable of reproducing in ivory. It has been well said that "the spirit of the fine arts is indeed everywhere latent in India, but it has yet to be quickened into operation." The Murshidabad carver is an adept in the art of carving any figure or design, even from so unsatisfactory a model as a photograph. If, at the outset, prizes or tempting prices are offered for reproducing good European or Japanese specimens of the art, it would at once effect an improvement in taste and design. Perhaps there will still be left some of that unnatural stiffness and want of flexibility in appearance which now mar the effect of their best products. I would, therefore, suggest the introduction of a training in this art in the Government Art schools under a competent English master of the art, who might also be employed as a travelling instructor, visiting the different centres of the art in the country by turns. Such an English artist would also be of very great use to the Calcutta firms as a sort of referee in case of differences arising between them and the ivory-carvers. His main work during his tours of inspection would be to train the ivory-carvers in the use of improved tools and appliances, and in teaching them to carve from life, and not, as at present, from a dead, fossilized model.

32. The introduction of better implements and improved methods will also solve another problem, which is closely related to the question of the amelioration of the industry. I allude to the cheapening of the products of the art, the prices of which are at present generally above the means of the middle classes in this country. If the trade is to expand in this country, the manufacturers must be able to produce good work at moderate prices, and this end can only be attained by economy of labour—by the introduction of improved machinery. No industry in these days can thrive simply on the support of the upper ten thousand. Besides, the tastes of the landed aristocracy have in most cases been vitiated by imported foreign products, and its ambition now lies in other directions than the resuscitation of a native art. Noblemen like the Nawab of Murshidabad and the Maharaja of Kassimbazar form the exceptions which prove the rule; but their single efforts are not likely to do much permanent good. I think the only hope of reviving the industry lies in the finding of new markets in Europe and America. At present these markets are hardly worked, if at all. Of course Indian art is not unknown in the European Exhibitions, but these exhibitions have not apparently hitherto led to many sales. If some European or native firms of Calcutta having agencies in the markets of those countries, could be induced to take the matter in hand, then the prospects of the industry would perhaps brighten in a short time. The firms must undertake to supply the Bhaskara and Khondikars with good ivory, and purchase from them their products at such prices as may be agreed upon beforehand. They must also arrange for the exhibition of the best specimens of the art in the likely markets of foreign countries, and to advertise them in various other ways, for every industry now-a-days thrives on advertisement.

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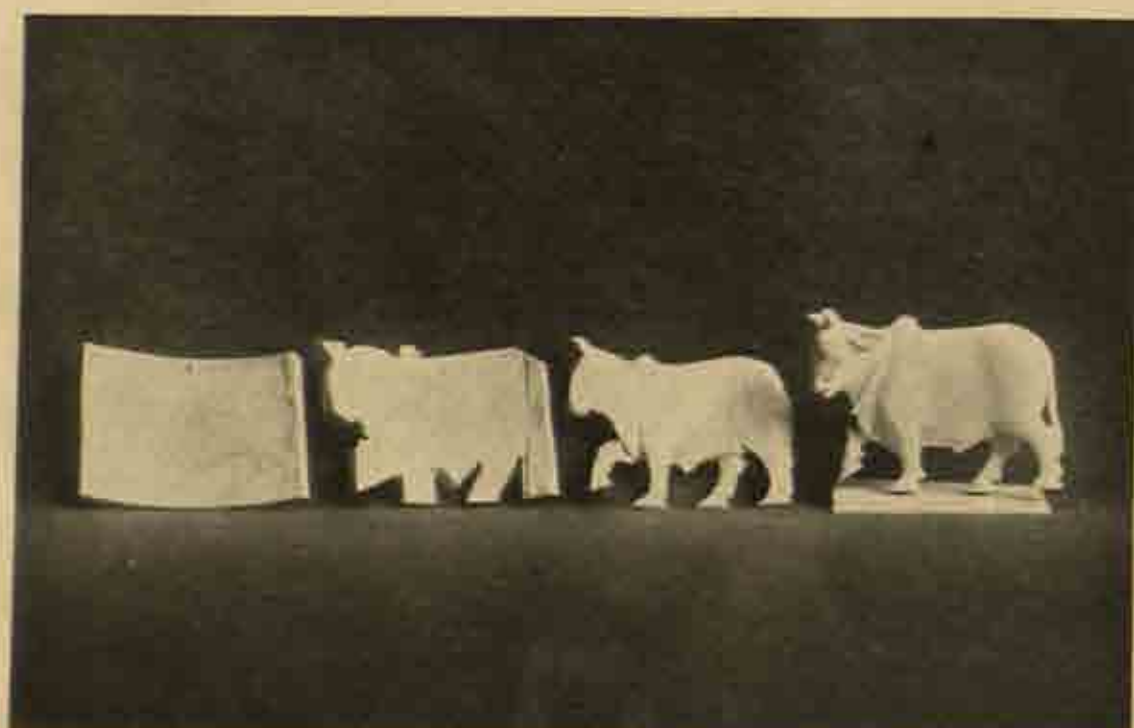
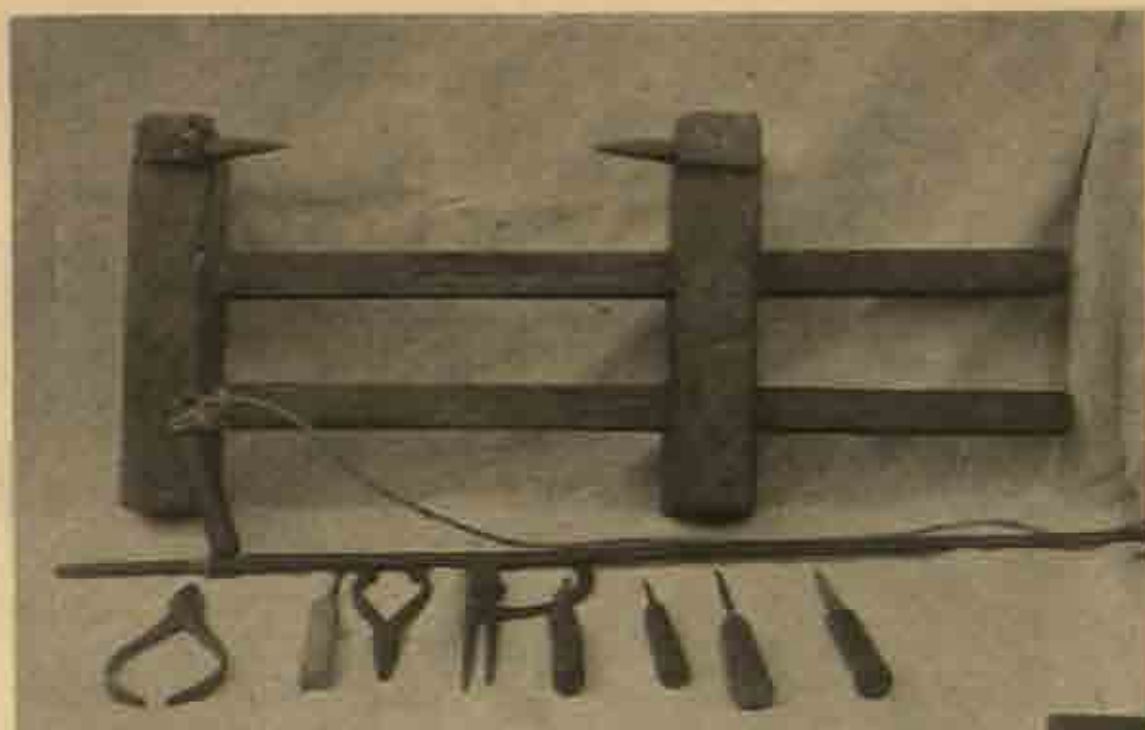
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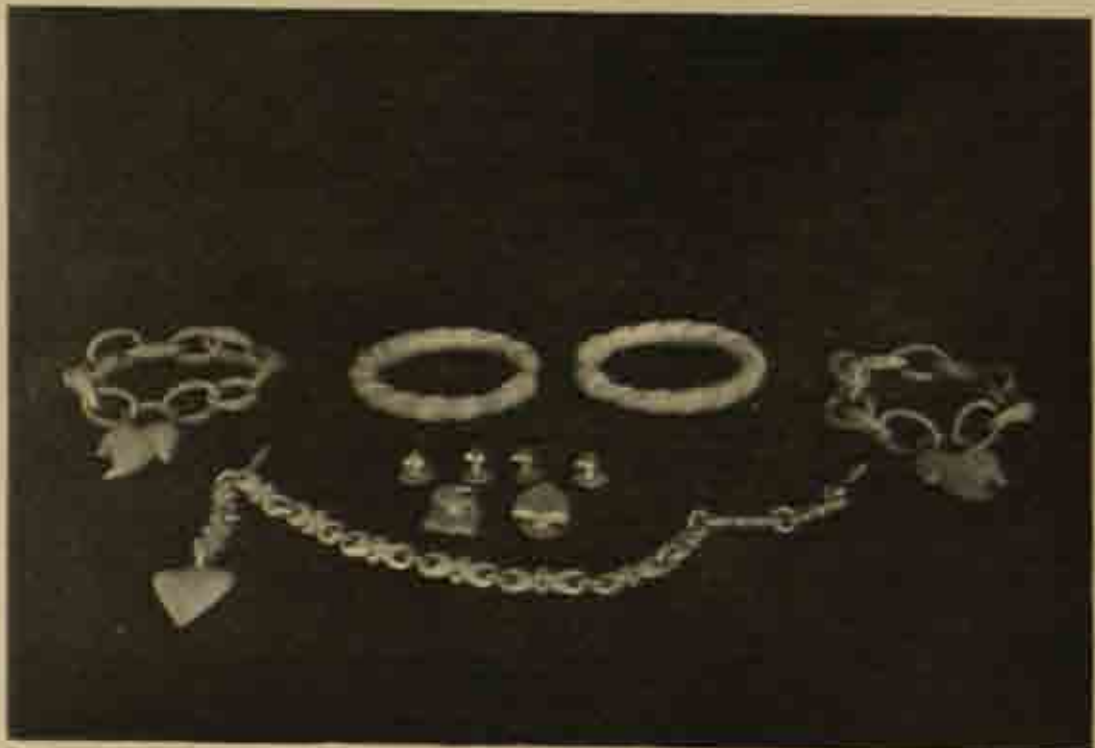
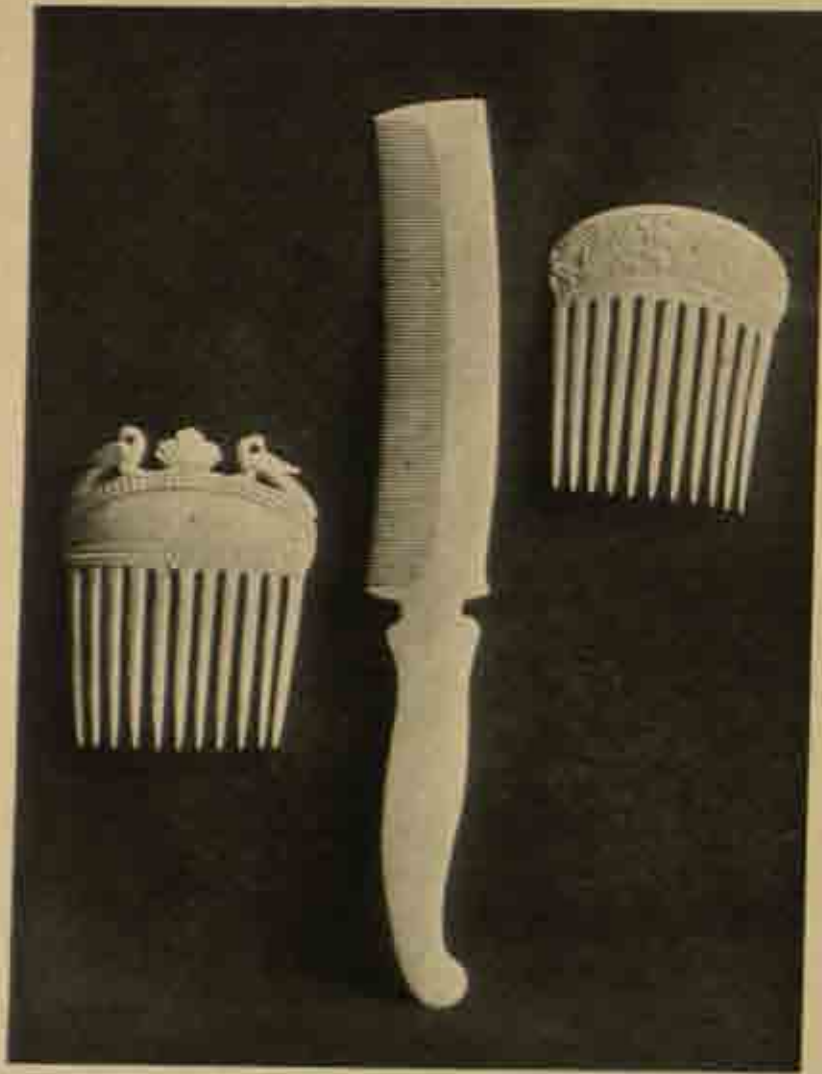
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Survey of India Office Calcutta, September 1910.

Plate No. II.



ARTICLES OF JEWELRY THE CARVED IN IVORY FROM MURSHIDABAD

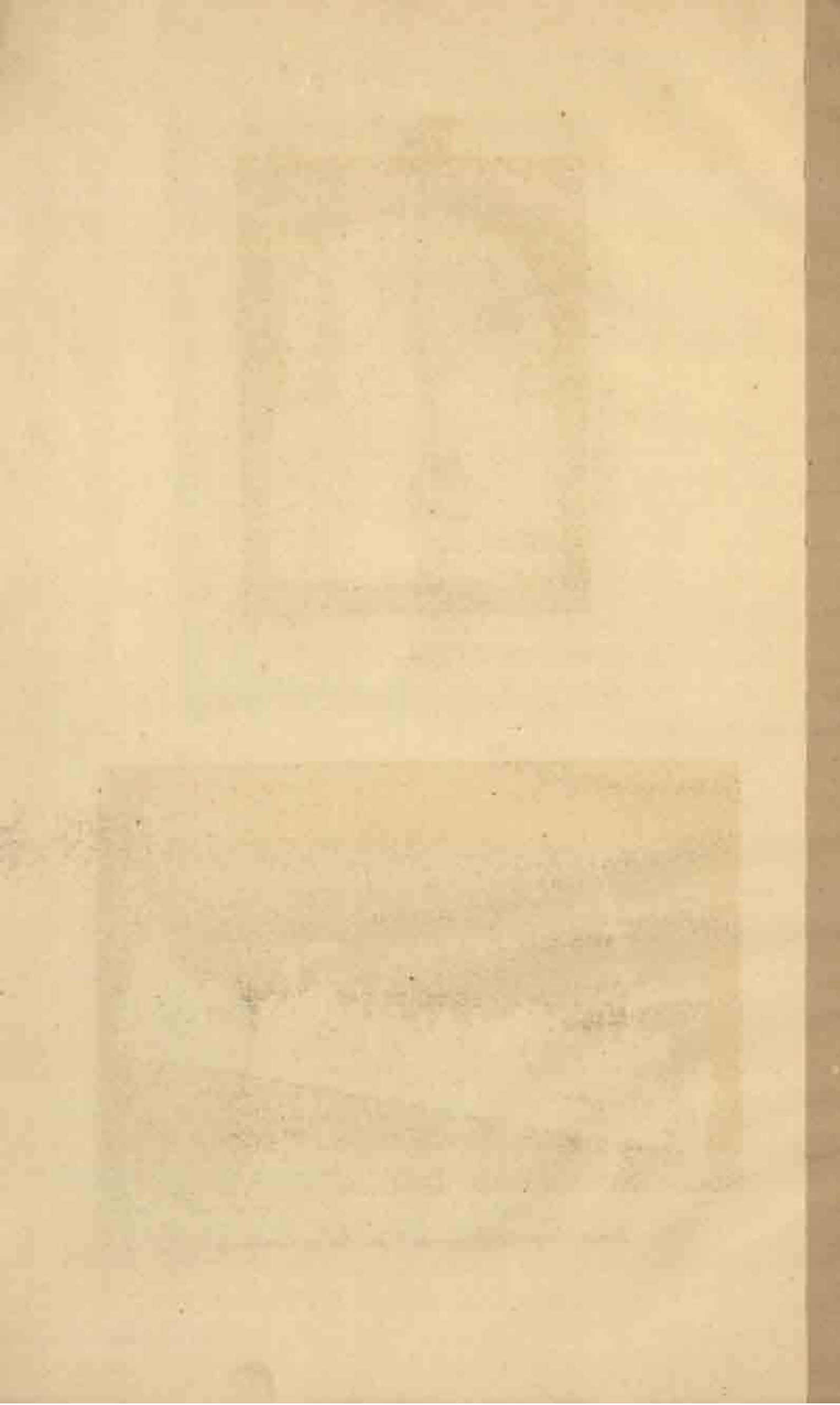


Plate No. III.



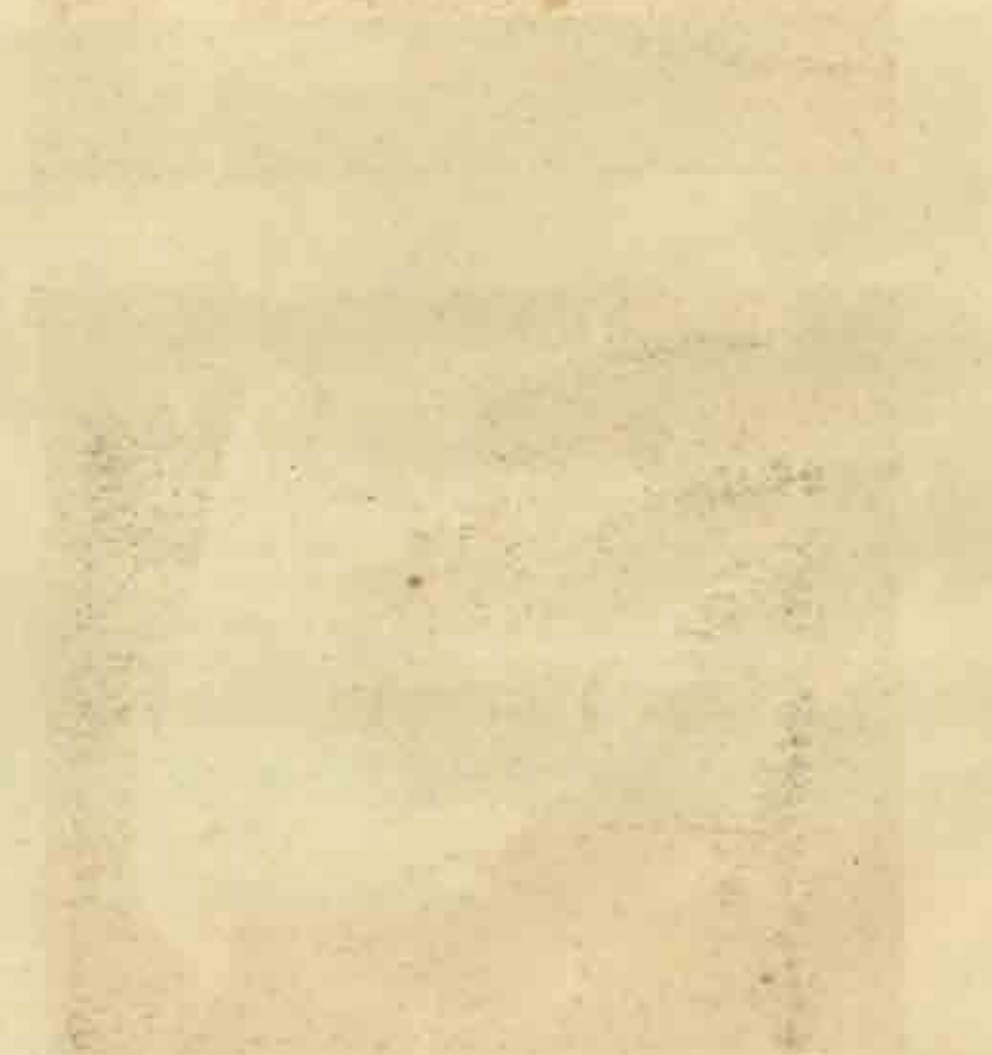
IVORY DURGA, HEIGHT 10", PRICE Rs 100.

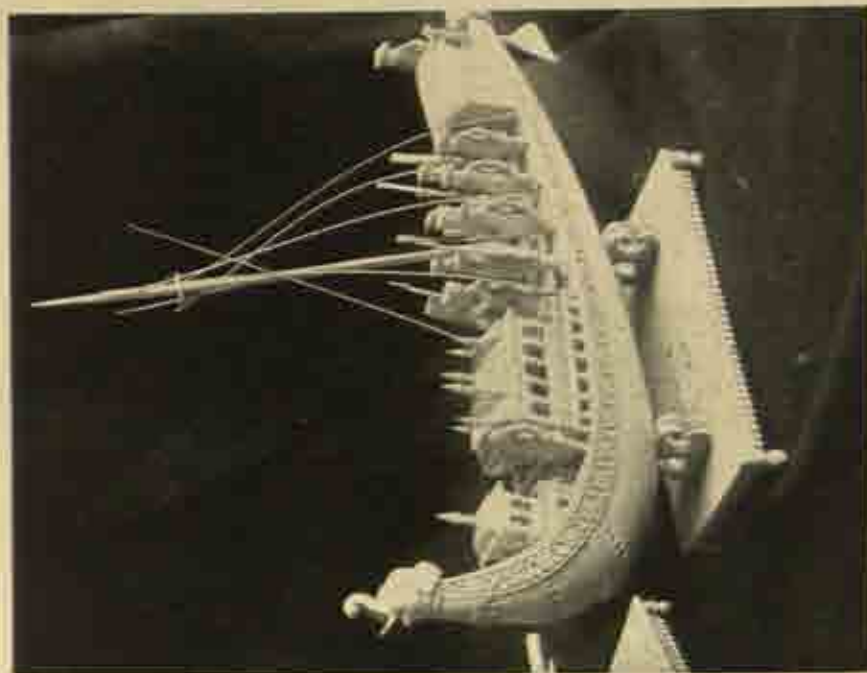


Designs

Group of India Office, Calcutta, September 1905.

JAGANNATH'S BATH PROCESSION IN IVORY FROM MURSHIDABAD, LENGTH 7' 10"

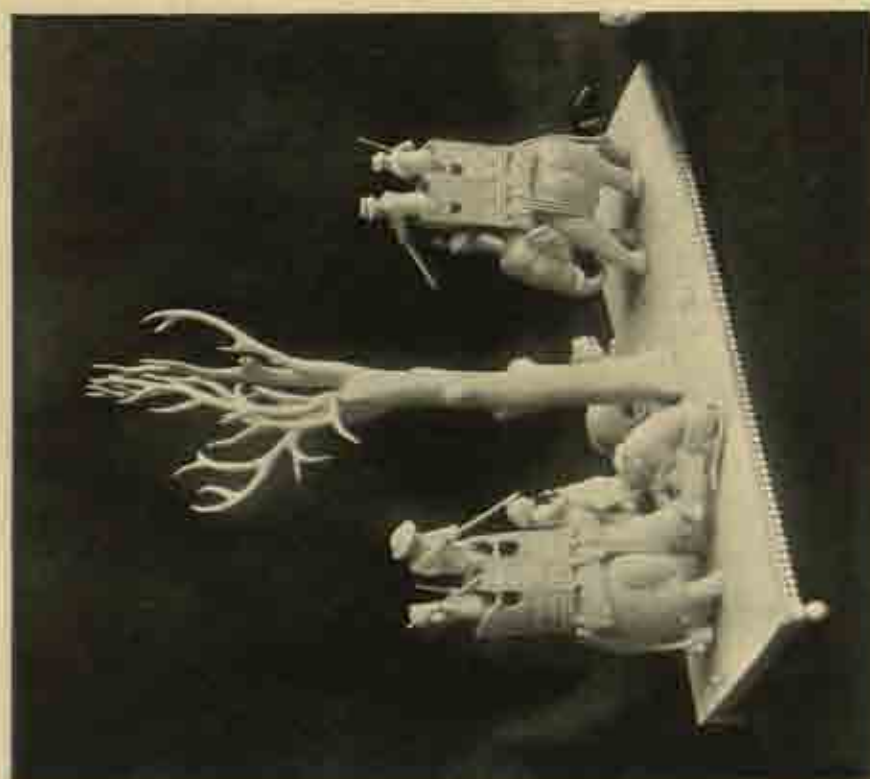




State Barge in Ivory from Mithunianad
Height 6 inches length 18 inches



State Barge in Ivory from Mithunianad
Height 6 inches



State Barge in Ivory from Mithunianad
Height 6 inches

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